
UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

Student Writings
2006

Utah Board of Juvenile Justice

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO DO THE WRITE THING

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**Utah Board of Juvenile Justice
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**The Utah Board of Juvenile Justice and the
Do the Write Thing Organizing Committee
thank the following for their generous
support of Utah's Do the Write Thing
Challenge.**

Brent and Bonnie Jean Beesley

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National Campaign to Stop Violence

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UTAH'S SIXTH ANNUAL CHALLENGE TO

Do the Write Thing

The Importance of the Do the Write Thing Challenge

Do the Write Thing is not about winning a prize. It is an essential part of a long-term strategy to help students and adults better understand each other and work together to prevent youth violence.

The *Do the Write Thing* Challenge is a program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence, which motivates students to make a personal, written commitment to resist and combat youth violence in their communities. Young people around the country are encouraged to voice their solutions for reducing violence that destroys so many young lives. The program works because it recognizes that the best solutions come from communities where violence takes place.

Utah's *Do the Write Thing Challenge* is sponsored locally by the Utah Board of Juvenile Justice. The Board monitors Utah's compliance with the core requirements of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, 2002. The Board is also responsible for administering more than \$1,000,000 in federal juvenile justice funds aimed at filling gaps in the continuum of juvenile justice services from prevention to treatment. Members are appointed by Utah's Governor.

How the Campaign Works

The Utah Board of Juvenile Justice sent information to all Utah school district superintendents and middle school principals encouraging them to involve their teachers and 7th and 8th grade students in the Challenge. Teachers were given suggestions about how to tie the Challenge into course work. Students could research youth violence as part of a history class, write a poem as part of an English class, or even consider youth violence from a social science perspective. Following a classroom discussion about youth violence, students were asked to write answers to three questions:

How has youth violence affected my life?

What are the causes of youth violence?

What can my community and I do to reduce youth violence?

School districts reported that more than 1,000 students participated in this year's Challenge with over 850 submitting essays. The Board selected 14 finalists whose work was then forwarded to Utah's VIP Judges. The panel had the difficult task of selecting a boy and girl national finalist along with runners up.

Utah's first place winners will participate with other National Finalists at the *Do the Write Thing* National Recognition Ceremony in Washington DC this July. Finalists are scheduled to meet with members of Congress to discuss the problem of youth violence. They will also attend a reception hosted by the Ambassador to the United States for the State of Kuwait. A book containing the student's writings will be placed in the Library of Congress.

Congratulations to all students that took the Challenge to do something about youth violence!

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

National Finalists

Kimilyn Poulson

*8th Grade, Ephraim Middle School
Teacher, Shannon Eicher*

Braden Roberts

*8th Grade, Ephraim Middle School
Teacher, Shannon Eicher*

Kimilyn Poulson - 8th Grade
Ephraim Middle School - Teacher, Shannon Eicher

Watching

Watching and listening

I see the stories on the news,
stories of grief, sorrow and agony.

I watch

and see the the kids at school;
the way they they act shocks me,
"pain is no big deal" they say,
"violence is cool".

Every time I hear it
it makes me sick
because they don't know the truth.

They don't see that pain does hurt,
that it penetrates
your mind and your heart;
that the hurt doesn't always
show on your face,
sometimes it hides inside
where nobody can see,
where it's like a dirty secret;
if anybody else knows
they won't tell.

Violence;

the word sounds dirty,
like it shouldn't ever be said...
but really, it shouldn't ever *be*.

Watching and listening

I see
all around me

Video games,

TV shows,

music.

I watch

and see they're full of violence

I watch kids bask in it
as if it's some kind of
cheap sunlight...

but in this sunlight,
it's much easier to get burned.

Watching and listening

I see the big violence
on the the news;

murder, assault, vandalism;
I wonder why people do it.
I watch
and the things at school seem small;
tormenting, teasing, exclusion;
but they just *seem* small.
they can hurt
just as much as the big things.

Kids are violent
in so many ways;
not just physically,
punching and kicking,
beating-up the smaller kids,
but mentally
and socially as well.
Name calling and taunting,
mocking, harassing;
they don't seem to realize
the hurt it causes.

Watching and listening
I see
violence at school,

and violence on the news
I suppose, in a way,
it's all the same;
not exactly,
but somehow they're similar.
I wonder
if maybe the big things
start with the small things
at school.

I'm just one
fourteen year old kid.
I'm not a gorgeous,
brilliant,
super-talented genius...
I don't have to be all of that,
I just have to be me,
one fourteen year old kid
because that's enough.

It's enough for me
that I know
where I'm going in life;
that I know

I can do a lot of things well;
that I know
I can watch
and listen
and learn
and help.
And it may be small,
insignificant even,
but even I can lend a hand.

Watching and listening
I can stand up for
the kids who are teased
and befriend
the ones who are excluded.
I can watch
and see
a way to make things better
for someone.

It may help only one kid,
one kid in billions,
one kid who might not even care,
but maybe that kid,
somehow,

will pass it on
to other kids.
And in passing it on,
maybe that kid
will help those kids
that really need it,
the kids that could really benefit.

Watching and listening
I can only do my best...
(It may not be much).
I can watch
and help whoever I can,
and try to get other kids
to help...
and together

maybe
we can change the world.

Braden Roberts - 8th Grade
Ephraim Middle School - Teacher, Shannon Eicher

Youth Violence

Youth violence has affected me by decreasing my self-confidence and self esteem. About a year ago there were some kids who would say rude stuff to me countless times, they would play jokes and pranks on my friends, and me and would ruin my personal belongings. One day when I was heading for lunch one of them tripped me and I cut my elbow pretty bad. That night at home my mom noticed that I had hurt it and she got concerned. I told her that it was an accident but she just kept asking until I finally told her. I thought she was over reacting when I said that they had done it before and she didn't need to worry about it. We talked about it for a while and she told me that she would take care of it. With in the next week or two I got called to the school office. The vice-principal came and asked if I was being bullied, so I told him everything about it. He told me not to worry and that he would talk to the students and that he would not mention my name. After a few periods the intercom announced that the students needed to go to the office. The next time I saw them they seemed kind of sorrowful. After that day they never picked on me ever again and they started to be a little friendlier to my friends and me. That day I felt lighter and happier for the rest of the day. I felt pretty relieved that I had gone out of my comfort zone and stop a few bullies.

One of the main causes of youth violence is while a child is still, young their parents and family members are violent and the child is raised improperly and follows their example. I think that is one of the main reasons of youth violence in America. Another way that a person may become violent is that he makes a friend with someone violent and doesn't want to embarrass them self in front of him or her and becomes violent. Peer pressure is another reason for a violent person, they don't want to lose their reputation so they become violent and will bully any one who tries to get to them. Another way may be that the kid was once bullied and wanted to get revenge and got them back and other people. Some other people may just become bullies because they saw what bullies do and wanted to do it also. It doesn't matter what way that bullies are made we just need to stand up and stop them through any nonviolent way possible.

I think that the worst thing that any one can do when violence happens is to sit around and not do any thing about it. When someone is getting picked on, even if you don't know them, you still need to stand up for what you know is wrong, even if it means

stepping out of your comfort zone. If more people would stand up against bullying than the world would be a better place. A lot more people would be more self confident and more reliant, and the ones that they help would have more trust in people that they didn't know. Why do people just sit around and watch or just ignore the situation when they know that it is wrong. I know that I have just sat around watching people get bullied before, but I promise that I will not do it again. People need to stand up and say or do something about bullying. You could go but in to the situation and start talking to the victim just like he is your friend, even when he is not, you could get a teacher or a parent and have them solve the situation. You could get a group of friends and all go and talk to him and see if you all could help him. There a lot of things that all of us can do about youth violence. The important thing is that we stand up and be heard.

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

Runners Up

Freddy Rosales

*8th Grade, Northwest Middle School
Teacher, Linda Lujan*

Natalie Young

*8th Grade, South Summit Middle School
Teachers, Kathy Dale & Chip Hayes*

Freddy Rosales - 8th Grade
Northwest Middle School - Teacher, Linda Lujan

Youth Violence

What would you do if your girlfriend or boyfriend told you "I want to break up with you." You may ask her or him "Why?" Your partner may reply "because I do not like you anymore, I like someone else." "Who?" You ask. "Your friend." This will definitely hurt you inside. Would you decide to get in a fight with your friend in order to show anger, revenge, and your pain? Apparently youth violence is occurring more often in our society. In the following essay, I will be talking about the cause of youth violence and how it is affecting me as well as my community, consequences, as well as suggestions on how youth violence could be prevented.

According to Paul J. McNulty, "Teenagers account for the largest portion of all violent crimes (pg. 171)." He also adds that "This violence is getting worse (pg. 171)." Teenagers ages between 17-19 are considered the most violent of all age groups. Murder and armed robbery is usually committed by males, of 18 years of age. McNulty gave this incredible statistic study, "The number of 13-15 years olds arrested for murder jumped from 390 in 1982 to 740 only ten years later (pg. 171)."

Youth violence is especially occurring for teenagers who live with a single-parent. Nowadays many teenage boys are growing up without fathers. This means that teenage males have no one to guide them, or have no one to show them from their own gender what responsibilities must be taken. For this reason many teenagers may feel "invincible." This may take them to the direction of hurting other people, including their love ones by choosing to be physical and verbally violent.

Youth Violence 2

Children that see everyday on television, movies, and video games are a cause of violence that motivates them to transform into violent teenagers. For example there was a kid who was playing a game named Grand Theft Auto and saw a character from the video game hang himself and committed suicide. The next day the boy who was playing the video game and saw what the suicidal character had done, decided to do the same thing by doing the following: He grabbed a rope and connect it to his bunk bed. He tied the rope into a lope and put it over his head to his throat. Sadly he climbed on the upper part of the bunk bed, and let himself go (CNN News).

Children who grow up in a violent family, are more likely than other children to be violent when they become a teen. For example if a child witnesses his father beating on his mother, he may have the idea that "It is o.k. to hit my future wife, a girl, or anyone who does not do what I say."

Drugs are becoming a serious issue and is one of the main reasons that youth violence occur in the community. Drug dealers are easily offering many young teenagers to join the "club." In other words, they are trying to manipulate teenagers to do drugs. Peers are also pressuring their friends to take drugs. Once a "customer" decides to take drugs, he or she will eventually be asking for more and without wanting, they will become more violent.

Sadly this is what happens around the world that relates to youth violence. This makes everybody and I wonder, if our society is still safe for people to go outside and enjoy the fresh air. Sometimes when I go to a mini store, for example the 7-Eleven store, I look at the customers and wonder if they are here to rob the store, or are they here for the

Youth Violence 3

purpose of shopping. Other times I'm afraid to walk in my neighborhood because I fear that someone may come after me, holding a weapon, with the purpose to physically hurt me.

What can I do about Youth Violence? There are a couple of things that give me the ability to make a difference by helping myself and other youths to make the right decision to avoid becoming a "violent youth." I can invite other classmates to actively join a sport activity or team. By doing this, not only will we express our fun and happiness; but we will also get out the negative thoughts from our mind. If I see or hear something suspicious from a friend or if I just overhear someone say "I'm going to beat him up after school," I should immediately tell a counselor, a teacher, principle, or a police officer from school. This may be considered snitching; but I'm helping by avoiding a youth violence issue.

In conclusion, Youth Violence is currently a huge issue occurring in our society. But there are ways to avoid problems in our neighborhood by doing positive alternative activities. But in my opinion, I think the kindergartens of today will be tomorrow's violent "thugs" of America.

Work Cited

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13. December, 2005

Natalie Young - 8th Grade
South Summit Middle School - Teachers, Kathy Dale, Chip Hayes

Youth Violence

How does violence start? Many people believe that violence is just in the movies we watch or in the music we listen to. It is much more than that, violence is all around us. It is consuming our nation like wildfire in a drought. "An intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius-and a lot of courage-to move in the opposite direction." [E. F. Schumacher] This quote speaks nothing but the truth. Anyone can make any problem bigger and worse than it is; but it is scarce few who can stand up and do what they believe is right. I pondered these questions, how has youth violence affected my life, what are the causes of youth violence, and what can I do about youth violence.

Youth violence has affected my life in a few ways. I grew up in a small rural town; then we moved the big city, Las Vegas. Las Vegas was a challenging place to grow up, violence was everywhere you turned. It was on the streets, in the schools, in the movies, and portrayed in music. In my school there were older kids that would bully younger students; this impacted my life greatly. Seeing all this violence made me resent violence even more. It helped show me through experience that there many other ways to resolve problems than by violence. Many of my peers turned to bullying and violence, because it was a way for them to express their emotions. This should not be happening to youth anywhere. Youth violence has made me realize that the future of our nation rest in the hands of this generation, which is struggling with violence. If this problem is not resolved, what will happen to our future?

The way that I view youth violence is that it starts out small. A few hateful words are thrown, offense taken. It then gradually becomes a larger problem until it evolves

into violence. Possibly few see it coming, or maybe someone sees it and regards it with little concern. Many children are abused emotionally or physically. This abuse can often lead to violence on the child's part. Another problem that can cause violence in youth is emotional conflict. Maybe they've never been able to release and express their feelings, and a way for them to do that is through violence.

My question now is how can I help this growing problem? What can I do to prevent violence in the future? There is a saying that goes, actions speak louder than words. Something that I can do is to be an example myself. Something that anyone can do, would be to not ignore these "little" problems, don't just turn your head the other way. I personally would like to stop being ignorant about what's happening around me. "By ignorance we mistake, and by mistakes we learn." [Proverb] This quote hits home; we all make mistakes nobody can be perfect. What we can do is learn from our mistakes the first time. We could take the easy way out and say the violence isn't happening. However, we will eventually have to face the facts. How about we all do a share and try to stop the hurt right now. We can make a change by helping to prevent violence in our schools and our community. Don't walk away when you see somebody getting abused. It is our responsibility as citizens of America to make it a better place to live in.

In conclusion, I believe that we all have a part in preventing this violence among the youth everywhere. Alone, nobody can stop this raging violence; but if we all put in our part to stop this violence, we can stop it. This is crucial to our country and its citizens. Youth everywhere should have a chance at a better, a less violent life. Let's all do our part and try to keep violence out of the lives of youth. Let's give them something to live for, something to look forward to. A better life without violence.

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
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State Finalists

Emily Bennett

8th Grade, Dixie Middle School
Teacher, Chris Cannon

Josh Limb

8th Grade, South Summit Middle School
Teachers, Kathy Dale, Chip Hayes

Priscilla Faasootauloa

8th Grade, Northwest Middle School
Teacher, Linda Lujan

Sarena Masco

8th Grade, Ephraim Middle School
Teacher, Shannon Eicher

David Hight

8th Grade, FOCUS - Provo School District
Teacher, Cheryl Thompson

Shiree Russell

8th Grade, FOCUS - Provo School District
Teacher, Cheryl Thompson

Jayson Isbell

8th Grade, Elk Ridge Middle School
Teacher, Janene Crane

Marissa Trujillo

7th Grade, West Jordan Middle School
Teacher, Amy Geilman

Ben Jacobsen

8th Grade, Ephraim Middle School
Teacher, Shannon Eicher

Mike Whiteside

8th Grade, Dixie Middle School
Teacher, Chris Cannon

Emily Bennett - 8th Grade
Dixie Middle School - Teacher, Chris Cannon

Youth Violence

The word *Violence* is defined as; the act of purposefully hurting someone, or, a turbulent state resulting in injuries and destruction.

According to End Youth Violence one out of every twelve kids is threatened or injured by a weapon in school, this is violence.

My question to our society is How? How did we end up with so much violence, or, the act of purposefully hurting someone, especially, in our youth?

One answer could very possibly be our society's "all about me" attitude. Shawn Johnston, a psychologist in California said, "The mental world of...young killers is 'all about me' they feel like victims...they have no concern about others...it's all about who they are and what they want."

If we don't care about other's feelings, how can we help but be violent? Maybe we could all stop being so self absorbed our "material" world and maybe join a service oriented club or group. If we stop thinking about only ourselves we would not be so inclined to "purposefully hurting someone else."

As much as we are self-absorbed, youth in our society have very little self-respect. You can see it by the clothes kids wear, the way kids act and carry themselves, and the way they talk.

Kids simply don't think about how much the way they appear will affect other's judgments about them. And it just gets worse from there. With the image they are sending to others, others treat them by how they appear. They treat them like they are bad and often in return the kids act up to that treatment.

Soon they are acting just how people judged them to be acting and often feel anger and resentment towards those and other people, and often themselves. This anger and resentment can sometimes lead to violence, creating a dangerous and threatening circumstance for everyone involved.

Judging people by solely how they look and act is often misleading and potentially dangerous, you should find out more about their life, background, and personality first, to some extent.

We cannot assume that everyone isn't dangerous and threatening, and sometimes may not have time to get to know the real person inside, and may have to judge by

instincts alone. But if you're not sure and not threatened do not assume what is not proven.

Take time to get to know anyone you meet before putting on the label of "good" or "bad."

I once met a girl who, at first glance, would look very hardened, troubled, and misguided. She was new, and soon we became good friends. Still, I thought of her as very hardened, too hardened, at least, to cry.

Then, when she stayed at my house we stayed up all night talking about everything. We somehow got on the subject of her life and family. I was surprised by all she had gone through and was now going through.

The next morning her mom called, with a big family crisis. My friend, did something I didn't think she could, she cried. Right then something clicked and I realized she was just like me in more ways than one. Her appearance just made you assume otherwise.

I am so glad I took the chance to get to know her and I helped her get somewhat away from the appearance she had. In my own way, I helped her and some of her other friends overcome some violent aggressive feelings.

Videogames and movies also have a great impact on the way we treat and think about others. We should not watch or play to many videos or games with violent images or story lines. Yet, that is a bit more optional.

Also being active in sports, music, dancing, or art can also help you control anger or aggressive feelings. When I am angry or depressed I often shoot hoops or play something on the piano. It gives you time to think everything over, and usually when you do, everything not so bad after all.

In the long run if we think more about others than ourselves, and take the time to get to know other people before we judge them, and stay involved and busy we should have a less violent society.

I really don't know how we became such a violent society, but I know we can reverse not all, but most of the damage that we have done.

Priscilla Faasootauloa - 8th Grade
Northwest Middle School - Teacher, Linda Lujan

Youth Violence

Walking Down the hall
Laughing groups, happy students
Dirty looks hit me

Teased and so lonely
Jealousy over comes me
Confident, but bold

Standing up to face
Them, afraid of the outcome
Breathing neck to neck

Pushing and shoving
Anger swelling up within
Words shot, uncontrolled

Retaliation
Trembling with fierce hatred
Movements quick to act

Violence darkens me
No more desire to live
Insane due to them

Thinking of their fate
Not stopping to say hello
Endure, in your lives

It won't last too long
Everyone will be sorry
Revenge tastes so sweet

Wanting to kill them
Plotting against all of them
Waiting for the time

Metal instrument
Something that kills them quickly
Pride in my great aim

Yes, that's the answer
Taking over Gods judgment
Feeling powerful

Walking on school grounds
Sweat running down my own brow
Shaking nervously

What am I doing?
NO! Remember my purpose
They hate me, that's it

Struggling with my
thoughts, heart, and soul saying No!
But my feelings stood

Standing up in class
Pulling the gun out slowly
Fright filled the classroom

God won't help you now
BANG! I shot, random directions
Screams could now be heard

Silence filled the room
I watched their lifeless bodies
A grin on my face

The door bust open
The security had me
They dragged me outside

Afraid and sweating
Seeing the red and blue lights
Sitting in the car

With shame and disgrace
Taken off to the station
Guilt creeping at me

Five deaths on my hands
However, I'm not to blame
Driven by cruelty

If I just got smiles
If only you could see me
If only, is too late

Now I sit here, lost
Thinking of what might have been
I know others pain

There's others like me
A simply hi or hello,
Just might save their life.

David Hight - 8th Grade
FOCUS - Teacher, Cheryl Tompson

Youth Violence

What is youth violence?

Youth violence is all around us all day every day. Most of the times you know some one that is experiencing youth violence and you don't even know that it is happening to that person. By the time that you find out that it is happening to the person it is probably to late and all the damage is all ready set is and they are physically and mentally damaged for the rest of there lives. Some times, you can heal and you could almost live a normal life. Physical violence isn't the only type of violence there are verbal, emotional, sexual abuse. It happens to some of the most unfortunate people and it is not fair for them when they did nothing wrong and they were just at the wrong place at the wrong time.

What causes youth violence?

The thing that causes youth violence is bullying and abusive parents they play a big role in youth violence. To have your parents treat you so bad really hurts you from the inside and could really damage you in the long run. Eventually you will start being violent to friends and family. When that happens you know that you have hit a low point and that you need some help so the sooner you get help the better off you will be and then you start getting better and hopefully stop being violent but if that does not work then you have only to blame you parents

How has violence affected my life?

Violence has affected my life many ways for all my life my dad has been very strict and for a punishment was a spanking and now that I'm older, it's a punch to the face or to the gut (that was a long time ago I haven't seen my dad for almost a year). My dad has had six wives in total. Every one he has yelled at and or broken something in an argument and it's always over something stupid. My dad drinks a lot. Every other day he goes to the store to by Jack Daniels and a great big bottle of vodka. When we go home he goes strait to the fridge to get a coke and then he mixes the vodka with the coke and by the time finishes one of our really big glasses he is really drunk. In addition, that's how violence has affected my life

How can I help stop it?

I could do my part to stop it by helping the hope group about gangs and graffiti and to help friends and family to stop being violent and to help my dad to stop drinking and to help stop fighting in general. I have a experience from a long time ago when my friend got in a fight and the guy pulled out a knife and he ended up stabbing my friend got stabbed 16 times and ended up in the hospital and I need to start doing better because my mom dos not need two kids in the hospital I have my 2 week old baby brother in the hospital and he was borne 2lb11oz and she is to busy worrying about him to have to worry about me getting in a fight. That is how I can help stop violence.

*Jason Isbell - 8th Grade
Elk Ridge Middle School - Teacher, Janene Crane*

Youth Violence in our Communities By Jayson Isbell

Youth violence can range from gang fights to teasing a kid at school. The word “youth” means state or quality of being young, or period during which one is young. The word “violence” means a use of physical force so as to damage or cause injury. When you combine the two you get quite simply: youth injury.

Violence comes in many forms. Some acts of violence are intentional while others are not intentional, however the result is the same. I have not personally been affected by youth violence, but many people have. There have been far too many families who have lost a loved one to drunk driving. This is one form of non-intentional violence. The people who drink and drive do not drink with the intent to injure or kill somebody in an accident, however, on many occasions they do. Another type of violence is fighting in the home. Many siblings fight, but afterward they are sorry about it and wish they had not fought. Many people have experienced different forms of violence at school. One form of this is even just seeing a kid pushed around, and doing nothing. Unless you do something about this you are just encouraging it. Another more serious form of school violence is if somebody brings a gun, or other weapon to school.

Many people who join gangs experienced violence before they joined the gang. For some it was at home, for others it was in their communities. Many people who are in youth gangs are in them for one of two reasons; one is suffering, and the other is neglect. At home many experienced violence from parents who were on drugs or alcohol, which is another cause of violence. Drugs cause rage and a loss of control. Others who are in gangs experienced violence in their communities. Some join gangs for protection, others for revenge, and some join just because their friends are in one and said it was fun. Another reason kids join gangs is because they want to feel like they are accepted by their friends, or because they were neglected at home and did not feel that they fit in with their friends.

Another way many kids are exposed to violence is through the media. One form of this is music. Music can be good, however, some music will make people want to do things that they would not think of otherwise. Other forms of media that expose kids to violence are TV and movies. Almost

every show has violence in one form or another. Another example of media violence is video games; many video games are filled with violence. Almost every part of every game meant for teenagers has to do with violence. The main problem with music, and movies and games is that it makes violence look fun, and like everyone is doing it. Some people lose a sense of what is reality and of what is fantasy. Congressman Jim Matheson has begun working on legislation to submit to congress regarding video games. He wants it to become a law that everybody selling Mature and Adult games must check for ID before they sell the games

You may be thinking, what can we do to prevent youth violence? Parents can talk to their kids, and find out how their day went, and if they were exposed to violence. Parents can relate stories from their youth about how they avoided and prevented violence. As youth, it is important that we not bully others at school. We need to be sure to include everyone. All it takes is for someone to get overly stressed or mad one time to put them over the edge. You never know what they may be capable of. Find other ways to deal with your anger.

I think violence is far too common in today's society. For example, when I walk down the middle school halls, I see many kinds of violence. I see pushing, I hear name-calling, and I hear obscenities. All of these are small but common forms of violence. We need to remember to think before we speak and act because we can never tell how much is too much for someone to bear.

Ben Jacobsen - 8th Grade
Ephraim Middle School - Teacher, Shannon Eicher

Eric J. Gordon

Eric J. Gordon, a tall, fourteen year-old red head, who happened to be one in my extensive ring of friends, has always been what you'd, call a people person. He knew how to get on the good side of teachers, could make the most serious face burst into laughter from one of his innumerable antics, and always never could keep someone mad at him(the teachers say it's his dimples.). Despite the inexcusably huge good about him, there was a side of him that wanted to break down in tears.

His upbringing had been enormously great, his parents, and Spanish nanny loving him immensely. He had been an only child, until his parents decided to have another. For nine months, five year-old Eric wondered why his Mom was getting bigger. Until one day, she looked in great pain, Eric was scared and ran to tell Irene, his Spanish 'other mother.' Irene called his father at work in court, who called an ambulance that shipped Mom to a big white house. Eric had no idea why his Mom left, and was concerned. For four days, he and Irene waited at home, anxiously, silently awaiting a telephone ring. One day, Irene was beginning to cook mac n' cheese, when the door bell rang, people in Sunday dress were at the door, Irene answered. For ten minutes they talked, Eric tried to listen to what they were saying, but it was just gibberish to him. Irene then closed the door, sat down, and started to cry. For three years, Eric had no idea what had happened, only knowing Mom and Dad weren't home, Irene finally took him aside when he was eight. Eric lived with his grandparents now, who had kept Irene employed because Eric could not part with her. Eric didn't know what to do, his Mom died giving birth, along with his baby sister, who suffered from having one shriveled lung, and his father had injected air into his own blood stream, causing instant death. Eric could not bear the stress, and spent his days at school hiding his fears of losing Irene, and exerting his sadness by making friends, and making jokes. In eighth grade, during lunch one day, his pent up anguish, would mutate, and be released.

Gary Miller, one of the school's bullies, who became addicted to pestering kids weaker than he in fourth grade, had a master plan. He would siphon mouldy yogurt into Eric Gordon's locker, who had made Gary look like an idiot in biology, causing his secretly crushed on girl to talk behind his back at lunch. When Eric opened the vandalized locker and stood shocked for half a second, Gary's buddy, Kevin O'Reilly, would don a ski mask, and shove Gordon's head into the yogurty mess, humiliating him, for life. Early, February 17th, Gary, and Kevin went to school early, and located Eric Gordon's locker, they inserted a small hose into the locker air holes. Gary pumped the yogurt in with a passion, grunting with effort of squeezing every last drop into Gordon's locker. They hastily hid the pump in the band room closet, and waited at Kevin's locker, that stood adjacent to Gordon's. The buses began to file into the parking lot, and not-so-eager students shuffled into the school building.

I walked with Davi Alexis, Calvin Jackson, and Tipper Anderson. We dragged out the time it took to get to our lockers, stopping at display cases, and checking lunch accounts. We saw Eric walk past us, who waved, and walked quickly to his locker. Out of all my friends, he enjoyed school the most, always trying to get to class quick to start on the day's schoolwork. We finished checking up on current events, and split up to stash our bags, jackets, and extra stuff into our personal lockers. My locker happened to be next to Eric's, who seemed to have difficulty opening the door to his locker. "Something sticky's in my locker," he muttered as I asked the trouble popping open my own door with a satisfying, 'chuh chunk.' I stuffed my back-back in, and gripped my biology book. Something wasn't right, I noticed an oozy substance sliding through a slight crack in the metal between Eric's locker, and mine. Eric swung his locker open, "What the crow?" he started, a swift blur shouldered me away, I fell to my back on the ground, grunting on impact. A strange, speckled goo sprayed my face, I wiped it away, and spat droplets of disgusting liquid out of my mouth. Dazed I stood up, and saw Eric leaning into his locker, like he was leaning out a car window to kiss a girl. I shook his shoulder, and he pulled his head away from the locker. His facial features were coated in slime, I couldn't tell who it was. The rest of the day had the usual bully routine over the intercom, Eric was otherwise normal, but gritted his teeth, every time Gary Miller graced the scene.

February 18th, Eric was cautious opening his locker, with giggles, and muffled laughter spitting out of any random kid's mouth. No yogurt, no heart wrenching shove into a mess of goo. Eric sighed, relieved. As school ended, Eric and I were talking by the parking lot, Gary Miller poked his narrow face from behind a dead bush, and gave thumbs-up to someone I couldn't see. SPACK! something hard and wet smothered Eric, I whipped around to see the poor guy covered in water, on all fours, shivering like his death was near. I quickly scanned the area, and saw a water balloon spiral from where Gary was, it was fast, and I didn't have time to say, "Eric!" when, 'SPACK!'

Eric's face kissed dirt, as the balloon bulls-eyed the back of his head.

Gary, was suspended from school, but Eric did not know this, neither did anyone else, at school he did not speak, but looked everywhere for Gary. I thought he just needed space, so backed off from the sulking red head. At lunch, Eric was late, but no one paid notice to that when Eric sat down at his usual table, and coolly produced a beautiful, black .22 bolt action rifle from his trombone case. For about seven seconds, it did not sink in, 1... *'There's Eric! 2... Woah! His grandparents really must have worked for that beauty!'* 3... *Black, a small clip,* 4...*Wait,* 5... *Are guns allowed at,* 6... *Oh, no, no, no.* 7...*Eric!* BAM! A floor tile chipped off the cafeteria floor. A girl wearing a pink jacket jerked backwards, obviously hit by the ricochet. Eric stood up, and whirled around at the vice-principal. Eric cocked the bolt back, an empty shell popped out of the gun, clanging loudly on the floor. Noise began to pick up as people prepared to jump Eric, one of my best friends. BAM! he fired again, glass shattered, students screamed, chaos ensued. Eric fired rounds into the crowd, aiming at Gary's buddies who were not suspended. George Marshall cringed, clutching at his throat, Jordan Dyring spun, a round whacking his shoulder. Rita Jones, Eric's long time secret admirer fell flat on her face, not even breaking her fall. I ran towards the only exit, and felt my left leg give out, I fell to the ground, and saw one pair of feet run past me, the shoes were Michael Jordan Nikes. Eric had those shoes, I looked up, and saw Eric slam the cafeteria doors, locked them, and peered inside intently. Someone grabbed me, hoisted me away from the doors. The scene was terrible, we had no bandages, or first aid kits handy, so napkins and shirts were being used for bandages, and spoons, forks, and knives were surgical instruments. Mr. Terrel, the algebra teacher began fussing with my leg, I looked to see why, but the librarian covered my eyes.

Three hours passed since the shooting, police, fire trucks, anxious parents, and ambulances stood just outside the school parking lot, Eric had not given up. Only kids that were not in the lunch room, as well as teachers, got out. When a police team burst in the building, Eric had sniped them off with his .22, no one could anticipate how ferocious Eric had turned overnight. "He has to run out of bullets." kids were saying to each other. Two kids, George Marshall, and Rita Jones were rushed into the kitchen, where no one was allowed inside. I think I know why, maybe they could have been saved, if help had come in sooner. I heard helicopters, and then the lights went out. The choppers stayed over the school, we heard soft thumps on the roof, and the helicopter droned away. Megaphones began to biare, many were parents asking Eric to please stop, others officers, assuring the students inside that they were safe. I began to reflect, if I had talked to Eric and made him feel better, maybe this would not have happened. Maybe, just some passionate words about how great he is, maybe.

Out in the halls, we heard a small fusillade going on, obviously some special team had landed on the roof, and broken inside. We listened anxiously, crowding at the small door window, flashes of light, and a single shot, 'BAM!' more light, 'BAM!' A long streak of white light filled the hall, I focused on a silhouette, that was crouched behind three locker doors, dark figures moved towards the silhouette, 'BAM!' One of the figures stalled, but kept going, 'BAM!' this time, the first figure fell. We began to bang on the door, and shout. All shooting stopped, and the door was kicked down, men in big black suits, wearing hockey helmets, walked in. I knew them from video games, Special Operations teams. We watched as the lead one began to speak to the vice-principal (the principal had escaped.). The team began helping us up with our wounds, paramedics ran to us, a nice looking man and a woman lifted me onto a stretcher, I started to feel dizzy, as we left the building with streams of unhurt students, we saw a red-stained white blanket draped over... over, Eric J. Gordon.

Epilogue, and author's note

It had been three weeks since the shootings, Eric had not made it, despite the best medical attention in the state. He tallied his massacre, to three deaths with his own. But he also inflicted many more mental deaths, bright, sunny students before became the home-schooled, thousand-mile-stare kids. I had to have blood donated, and crutches, but I think I'll be all right. The only part of the incident that haunts me though, is that, I, of all people, could have prevented this terrible event.

This is an entirely fictional story, since I have had no life of violence more than a spank on the bottom, I decided to create Eric J. Gordon. The main character told you that he could have prevented the killings, and that a few passionate words could have kept Eric from his decision. This probably is true, some people just need to be reassured and talked to. I know it helps me, when I get bullied.(every day) I just need my friends to talk. I hope you didn't fall asleep reading my mediocre book.

Josh Limb - 8th Grade
South Summit Middle School - Teachers, Kathy Dale, Chip Hayes

Would've, Could've, Should've

Do you remember Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris who attended Columbine High School? If you don't, let me remind you, the two boys shot and killed, "...thirteen students and one teacher," according to disastercenter.com. There are many people that could've prevented the death of these students. Some of which include Eric Harris's parents. Eric and Dylan had been making bombs in the basement of Eric's house. They would not allow anyone to go into the basement, not even Eric's parents. Some students and teachers at Columbine High were forewarned; Eric told his psychology class that he had dreams about killing students and teachers. Dylan and Eric made a video for an assignment called, "Hit Man for Hire." Students at Columbine also harassed, tormented, and made these two boy's lives miserable. Teen violence is not necessary, and can be prevented by ordinary people like you. The people that could've prevented the fourteen deaths, in this tragedy at Columbine, were ordinary people like you and me. Youth Violence can be prevented by any ordinary person. Youth violence is not necessary, because youth violence has had an enormous impact on my life, there are things that can be done about youth violence, and youth in Utah, the United States, and the world need to have personal goals and responsibilities.

Youth violence has had an impact on my life. I see violence all the time at school. There are bullies harassing, picking on, and beating up many other kids. I, myself, was at the front end of some bullying, and I will tell you, I am not a geek. When I was in seventh grade, I couldn't even walk in the hall without getting teased, punched, hit, tripped, depantsed, or kicked. I don't understand how people could do such things to

their fellow classmates. I stopped this harassing by sticking up for myself and fighting back. The way I stopped the harassing may not have been the best way to solve the problem, but it worked for me. In my opinion, the only reasons that youth use violence are: they are not sure of themselves, they have seen the same violence before whether it is in movies, at school, in video games, at home, or on the streets, also jealousy, or to make themselves look good.

People need to stick up for others, they need to care for others, and they need to think of the consequences. I stick up for others by telling the person that is not being nice to another person how I felt about them doing whatever they did. I do tell the person this, because that little statement will leave something in that person's heart, eventually whatever the person is doing will stop. Mr. Hayes, my U.S. History teacher once said, "It takes one month for a habit that has been going on for one year to get the habit to stop." I agree with this quote, because I have witnessed what the quote is saying. I will give you an example dealing with basketball; I used to have a bad habit of looking at the ball when I dribble. This habit had been going on for five years. The habit took me just under one year to get over. It is my suggestion that to stop youth violence we need to tell someone like the police, teachers, or parents if we see a problem with another person. Small problems can turn into one colossal problem, as Klebold and Harris's did. We need to have harsher penalties for youth violence such as: going to a counselor at least three times a week, serving hours of community service, writing an apology to the victim, violence prevention classes, moving the accused to a new house and a new parent if needs be, time in juvenile detention, and maybe even a few days in jail. This would definitely prevent youth violence.

Last, but not least, the youth need to have goals and responsibilities. I am sure that if youth have more responsibilities, youth violence will happen less often. In our schools we need a class that teaches personal goals and responsibilities. “The game is my life. It demands loyalty and responsibility, and it gives me back fulfillment and peace.” This quote is by the greatest athlete and basketball player in history, Michael Jordan. I think that if more of the youth in today’s world set high goals and responsibilities and followed them, youth violence in the world would decrease. If someone set a high goal or dream, like Michael, and followed it, they would be too busy working on the goal to be participating in youth violence. When this person meets their goal, it will give them back something like money, confidence, experience, and many other things.

In closing, I would like to say that I do not believe in youth violence. Youth violence destroys not only the victim, but also the person using violence. It is my belief that if more of today’s youth would follow my advice; they would not have to go through the pain and consequences of violence. Always remember the people that could have helped Klebold and Harris but, didn’t.

Sarena Masco - 8th Grade
 Ephraim Middle School - Teacher, Shannon Eicher
The Darkness and Light of the World

*Everyday I wake to a new day,
 And start off with peace and happiness.
 Ready to await the new day.
 Sometimes I wish it stayed that way,
 Throughout the whole day.
 As I start on my way to school,
 I think about my own education
 Or sometimes I just sit there
 And laugh with my friends.
 But mostly I just try to sit and listen
 To see how the world is doing.
 As I listen I hear terrible things that have happened to others
 That I think should have never happened.
 A loving kid kidnapped from his caring family.
 A helpless, once untainted woman,
 Forced by a cruel person to give birth to a child.
 A families home is destroyed,
 By flames of destruction and death, or by the poison of a gun.
 A bank robbed by a someone of greed.
 A family grieving over a lost loved one,
 Who was taken by the cruelty of sickness and death.
 More than a few innocent people
 Who had been forced to suffer and some even die,
 Just because a few careless people
 Had been foolish enough to take the alcoholic drink of pain.
 These things I hear at least once a week or even once day.
 As I listen, I think how could these things have happen?
 To those who only did the right thing,
 By obeying the law and helping, loving and caring for others.
 Finally school comes.
 Praying that the lives that are suffering will be helped
 I go there with a hopeful heart but sad expression,
 That I try to hide, hoping that the day will bring more cheer.
 Yet as I watch other people my age,
 I wonder if something terrible has happened to them,
 Leaving them to feel all alone and sad
 And sometimes anger towards other people.
 Some people know what pain is. It has gone through their lives.
 Yet, they too try their hardest,
 To make others happy and not sad.
 When they do echo their sorrow
 I wonder how they were able to put on a smile and stay strong*

Through it all.
For I was certain that I couldn't have made it through it all.
I had asked some people ; "How did you do it?
How did you survive from the pain you have received?"
I had gotten several answers
But they overall held the same meanings.
They said they had to survive and live
For the others they loved and cared about.
"Besides," some say:
"When I make someone else happy, it makes me feel happy.
And Life isn't always full of pain.
Life is also full of wonderful experiences
From the beginning to the end."
When they say this, I feel happy too.
And I try harder for the ones who haven't realized this yet
To know that they will always have someone who loves and cares for them.
The school bell rings to tell us that its time to go home.
I once again listen and hear the pains of the world,
But this time I know that everything will be okay,
Because these things happen to us and others
Because it's the only way for us to know the true meaning of happiness and joy.
And that everyday while some people suffer or are hurt,
Others will go and help them
Making them see the light of the world once again
And not have them stay in the darkness.
And I know that by just staying in school
And by doing the best I can to get good grades and learning,
I am helping people because in the future
When my time comes
I too can help people who are suffering and hurting
In the ways they are doing right now.
But for now its beyond my knowledge and understanding.
But by staying in school and helping the people I know and love,
I know that I am helping others.
In a way I also know that its not enough and that I could do more
So I'm going to strive harder to help the people
That are in the darkness,
To see the light.

Shiree Russell - 8th Grade
FOCUS - Techer, Cheryl Thompson

Violence

What is youth violence? It can mean so many things to people. To me violence is when people are doing bad things that they are not suppose too. I was a violent person I would go and run with gangs and do bad things that I was not suppose to be doing. I would get into fights and do thing s that I would regret. I know now that fighting is not the way to solve anything it just escalates the problem. Fighting is stupid don't do it, it is like you are letting that person you and you cant be yourself so you have to fight to look good for your friends or have them except you. When really you are not with your true friends. Because your true friends will not let you get into trouble. What caused me to fight and me bad and mean was any little thing that made me mad like if a girl would look at me in the wrong way I would go and fight her. Violence has effected my life in so many ways. It would effect my school , family, and people around me. Growing up I was abused by my mother, she would let the situation take control of her. So what made me want to stop being violent was my family. I would see how my family how they acted violent so I would start acting violent. Then I would think to myself they are so stupid and one day I woke up and looked at them and said I don't want to be like you. I don't want to go up and have a husband who hit me and be like my mom and hit my kids I said no way I'm not going to be like you. I am going to be stronger and stop the cycle. My family was really supportive they helped me so I helped my mom. She now is no longer violent she has self-control she taught me more that what I already knew. So I started seeing my little brother trying to act like how I use to so then I knew I had to stop it. Because he was was following in my footsteps. I didn't want him to turn out like that so I stopped him. How can I stop violence? How I can stop it is to be an example for people for people that are older younger than me maybe even older than me. What I can tell you is do not do violence try to stop it. This world would be a better place if there weren't violence. Violence is everywhere it is in our communities and with family and friends. Violence effects every body around it affects family friends and people who we love and care for. I just wish that I could help the people who are violent become better people and help them to do the write thing. Also I wish this world was a better place.

Marissa Trujillo - 7th Grade
West Jordan Middle School - Teacher, Amy Geilman

Stopping Youth Violence

Today, the youth in Utah, and everywhere else, are surrounded by violence. They see it on TV, and on their video games. Some kids read about it in books, or in the newspaper. Some even have violence in their own homes. I'm lucky enough not to have to see violence in my house, but I know someone that didn't have that fortune: my dad.

My dad was raised in an environment where violence and fighting was encouraged. If they wanted anything-an object, a person to do something, etc.-they were taught to use violence to get it done. My dad has told us many stories of his childhood and all of them scare me. It makes me feel even sadder for children who have to go through the same things as my dad. However, the only reason my dad was raised that way is because my grandfather was raised that way, which shows that violence is a vicious, learned cycle. It can be broken, though. My dad broke the cycle in his family, and now my family knows that violence is not the answer to anything. Yet some people don't know this, and even some that do know this still show violence. Why is this?

I think that it's because some people bottle up stress, jealousy, and irritation so badly that when they explode it's hard for them to contain themselves. Now, all of these enclosed feelings are some that everyone has to deal with, yet some people handle them so that they don't have to explode like others. Unfortunately, not everyone does that and violence comes up and out of them just like that-and all the bad things they've kept inside of them just rush out of them. Soon they want to "get even" with someone, then they get mad and lash out at someone else. It's just a huge chain of violence that somebody is creating, and so many kids have to watch that chain continue to grow, faster and faster

with each act. Some children even end up doing some of these acts themselves. How can we stop this?

I think we all just need to try to be kind and try to break the chain of violence. If an act of violence occurs, do double that in kind acts. We need to smile more, be happier. Maybe it'll help someone else be happy-someone that now has the courage to break the violence cycle-and then another and another. Soon there will be a chain of kindness and happiness, instead of another chain of anger and hurt. Don't we all want something like that to happen?

I believe it can. I'm always seeing something good happen, as well as something bad. Happiness can turn into a cycle just as well as violence can. We just don't want this cycle stopped. Let's all try to do something kind. We don't have to do great, unforgettable things; we can just try to be nicer to others. We can start by being kind to our family and friends, and then we can be nice to other people, a person at school, maybe a neighbor. All of these acts of kindness can help slow youth violence down. Maybe, if everyone works hard enough, youth violence can stop. It all just depends on what we want and the choices we make. I want youth violence gone, do you?

Mike Whiteside - 8th Grade
Dixie Middle School - Teacher, Chris Cannon

YOUTH VIOLENCE TODAY

There's a lot to be said for youth violence. In 2003 and for the most part of 2004, teen homicide has been the second major cause of death. With so many things to blame, it's hard to really know what the problem is. You can blame the music. You can blame the games. You can blame the TV. But the odds are, you'll never get the real answer. So I'm going to give you what I believe and my personal experience with the subject. It's not a lot, but it's affected me. What I have to say may or may not give you some insight on why and how youth violence occurs.

First off, I have personal experience with the subject. Not directly though, I haven't been in a fight or anything like that. But one of my best friends, who moved to another state, was a victim everyday for years. She was shoved and unnoticed at school. She felt invisible, muted, and restrained. She was essentially the ghost everyone loved to hate. Day after day every bruise and every insult stayed with her. She could not take it anymore. Her friend had died, she was an outcast, and life had lost its meaning. I got an email after a few days of silence on her part. She was being released from the hospital from attempted suicide. A few months later, she tried again. And succeeded.

I don't know if teen suicide counts as youth violence. But a few of the factors, I know, can definitely count. Bullying and exclusiveness in school peers are probably the biggest cause for it in my opinion. Music, as much as it may seem, probably has less of an effect than you might like to think. If it really affects the child, the child has put too much of an image of someone else on themselves. It's ok to have negative feelings you just have to learn how to deal with them in a way that's acceptable. Videogames are another blame. You'd think the child would play the game to get rid of, not fuel, anger for whoever the target happens to be. I'm not blaming teens, but if they're blaming music or games or TV, the odds are they're choosing those because they hear them all the time. They hear everyone complaining that something is to blame, and as soon as they don't want to take responsibility for their actions, they'll blame the same thing everyone else does. So you might never know what the real reason is.

The real reasons are rarely as simple as they seem. A kid may be heartbroken beyond repair and when he snaps, he'll blame the first thing that comes to mind. Not himself. I know I would. Things to blame may be home life being rough, bottling up feelings with no release, losing someone or something they loved (very common and very familiar), or even youth violence around them that not even the victims understand. They just see it, and they do it. Maybe to fit in, or to be cool and belong, its different for a lot of people. That doesn't make it right.

As for what we can DO for violence...I really don't know. Youth programs are probably our best bet, but the kids have to start wanting help and admitting there's a problem or else they'll just fight it. Just saying you need a positive attitude isn't going to work. You need to get inside them and show them. You need to teach them. We need show each other what's right.

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